



Engagement standards in participatory research for the Africa RISING Program

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Africa RISING is a research for development program that aims at providing pathways out of poverty for smallholder farmer households through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

Participatory research is a key foundation to achieve these goals and emphasizes the importance of engaging relevant stakeholders in all steps of the research process. Participatory research approaches therefore demand a level of engagement and commitment from farmers that researchers need to respect. Equally, researchers need to engage with each other for mutual learning, integration of research activities and to ensure that farmers are not overburdened by research activities. In order to avoid redundancies and add value, the program will leverage other opportunities with different stakeholders and complimentary projects.

This document provides some guidelines to researchers that will help to avoid negative relationships between them, farmers and other stakeholders and foster ethical conduct within the Africa RISING community.

Farmer engagement in research processes

Diagnostic studies

Gaining an understanding of the farming and wider livelihood systems targeted by research projects is an essential step in targeting research activities that will lead to impact and measurable development outcomes. As the first point of engagement between projects and communities, proper conduct of such studies can help to establish lasting trust and partnerships between all actors in the research process. The guidelines that should be followed:

- Diagnostic studies are generally highly extractive in nature with farmers gaining little direct benefit from them. They could however raise farmers' expectations of future exchanges that operate on a two-way basis. It is not advisable to conduct diagnostic studies without clear follow-up activities. It is imperative that researchers avoid causing community members having unrealistic expectations. This includes pointing out the limited period of the engagement. At the start of the research process, participants should be given an opportunity to clarify their expectations. Farmers should be made aware that the researchers also rely on what farmers have agreed to contribute and that it is therefore important that farmers make firm commitments.

¹ These guidelines will be reviewed and adjusted in line with evolving CGIAR guidelines around engagement, ethics, and data curation.

- Having said this, well-conducted diagnostic studies generally stimulate dialogue with participating farmers and catalyse buy in from them. Responses like “Sorry we don’t have time, the next question is....” are not an acceptable for queries from farmers. It is therefore advisable that researchers should build time into the interview schedules that allow for satisfactory responses to any questions / discussions that farmers might initiate.
- Before starting a diagnostic survey, farmers’ consent to use their data confidentially must be obtained.
- Farmers often give up a considerable portion of their busy days to participate in diagnostic activities. Respect this by conducting interview schedules on time and organizing things, as far as possible so interviewees are not waiting around.
- When planning field activities of any type, but particularly for diagnostic interviews, familiarize yourself with the farming calendar. To the extent possible, conducting socio-economic surveys during peak periods in the farming year (planting, weeding, harvesting etc.) should be avoided. Having a proper understanding of the gendered division of work and responsibilities would provide a clear understanding of the periods when women and men are available to participate actively in diagnostic activities.
- After completion of a diagnostic study researchers should provide feedback to the communities about their findings. These feedback sessions also allow for validation of the study results. For better planning, these feedback meetings to the communities should be a standard item reflected also in the researcher work plan.

Identifying research problems

It is imperative that the farming community is actively engaged in selection and prioritization of research topics. This fosters inclusiveness and integration of community perspectives in research thereby implementing research that is more responsive to farmers’ needs. During this process:

- Researchers and community members need to come to a mutual agreement when establishing research topics, approaches and identifying viable interventions. Researchers and community members determine what works and what does not work, or what is within the project limits and donor interest.
- Researchers and farmers should be realistic about what their research can accomplish to build trust among researchers and community members.
- Gender roles influence the perceptions of men and women on research problems. Therefore gender has to be considered as a significant component in identifying research problems. Compare the similarities and differences between men and women’s experiences and perspectives and value them equally. This will generate a more comprehensive picture of the problem, and facilitate design of tools, which will better address gender differences.
- Power relations between men and women influence their perspectives about their problems and proposed solutions. It is imperative that researchers take into account the roles of men and women and other prevailing cultural norms and how these may impact on the outcomes of the research.

- Researchers need to listen to the voices of community members and share power in making research decisions. There is need to be sensitive to gender and cultural issues within a community.

Selection of research beneficiaries or participants

Researchers need to be flexible in determining who represents the community so as not to miss out on what is important for the community. Criteria for selection could include among others: willingness to host the experiment, willingness to share and teach other farmers, openness to visitors, ability to follow the protocols, visibility and accessibility of plots, reliability of experiment management.

- Involve community leaders in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to further create a sense of ownership and acceptability of the research.
- It is important that researchers understand that farmers' participation is voluntary. Levels of participation may differ according to interest, resource availability and cultural context. Some people will be highly motivated to participate while others may not.
- Pay special attention to the category of people who tend to be discriminated in research for development programs. These could be women, youths and the landless people among others. A thorough context analysis should provide for the development of specific strategies to include them.
- Be aware of the fact that the interests of researchers and community members influence their perceptions on who to work with and how, where and when.

Conducting research

In order to ensure continuity from diagnostics to results and later on adoption, farmers who were engaged in the earlier stages of the research process should be included in the research implementation. This adds to building ownership and trust between researchers and farmers.

- Prior to beginning a study researchers must disclose to all participants the overall objectives of the project and its sponsor. Transparency allows farmers to make informed decisions whether to engage in the project or not. Researchers have to be clear about the voluntary nature of participation and seek consent in an open manner. Farmers may reject or withdraw their consent at any time in the course of the research.
- Constraints and risks associated with technologies should be made known in advance and mitigating measures should be put in place.
- When researchers and farmers agree to work together, the group has to decide on the modalities of working together. This includes setting goals and objectives, selecting methodology, agreeing on methods of communication, sharing roles and responsibilities and agreeing on the processes of data collection, monitoring and evaluation. This might require training of farmers in data collection.
- Select gender sensitive tools, methodologies and approaches, which will encourage and enhance active participation of men, women and youth and conserve integrity.
- Collect and generate data that is meaningful to the community to create a sense of ownership

and sustain participation. It's important that the research seeks information that will be useful to the community and also influence policy.

- Assess the impact of the proposed solutions on men and women in terms of their capacity to access resources, workload, social status, and power relations.
- Some of the meeting venues and time may not be convenient for men, women and youth to engage actively. Therefore, researchers should have a clear understanding of the effect of a venue and time on participation of men, women and youth to avoid exclusion.
- Conflict of interest between researchers and community members, or amongst researchers or among different groups within a community will be encountered at different stages of the research process. Community members and researchers need to come to an agreement on different aspects of the research at the onset to minimize conflicts.
- Regular feedback sessions should be scheduled to inform farmers about experiments and use of their data. Equally important are these feedback sessions for researchers to get the views of the farmers to adapt the experiments or data collection tools.

Completing engagement with farmers

Researchers must ensure a smooth conclusion of the engagement by involving the key stakeholders, who were involved in previous stages of the research. Conclusion may happen gradually or suddenly depending on various factors (local, external).

- Should project activities be phased out, farmers should be informed in due time about the reasons and the completion process should be agreed upon. Farmers should be informed about the researchers' next steps to ensure farmers will benefit from their past engagement.
- Researchers need to reflect upon potential negative effects associated with the end of the engagement and consider compensation if necessary (preferably in kind).

Researchers' engagement with peers

Sustainable intensification needs coherence and integration of research results. Therefore, researchers need to work with each other to leverage opportunities and resources. For this to happen, researchers need to treat each other with respect and be cognizant of the fact that peers often come from different institutions. The following guidelines for working with peers are suggested:

- Avoid redundant surveys through coordination with other researchers and making use of each other's data. This will reduce farmers' research fatigue and support our objective of systems research.
- All research results have to be validated by stakeholders and farmers.
- Training in participatory methodology and its application is a requirement for all researchers.

Researchers' engagement with other stakeholders

Apart from engagement with farmers and peers, researchers build partnerships with extension agents, other development agencies and complementary projects, private sector, policy makers, national agricultural extension and national research institutes. Engaging especially with national institutions aims at achieving sustainability of the Program through institutional capacity building.

Sub-contractors should follow the engagement standards with farmers and peers. When working with other stakeholders, researchers should ensure that stakeholders are aware of these standards.

Risks of working with Africa RISING, e.g. finite duration of the program, need to comply with reporting requirements, financial standards, etc. need to be explained to sub-contractors.

Partnerships should be monitored and performance be reported back regularly to stakeholders.

When disengagement with other stakeholders is required for whatever reason, researchers must ensure a smooth conclusion of the engagement. As with farmers, conclusion may happen gradually or suddenly depending on various factors (local, external).

- Should project activities be phased out, stakeholders should be informed in due time about the reasons and the completion process should be agreed upon.
- Researchers need to reflect upon potential negative effects associated with the end of the engagement and keep these as low as possible.

Data handling

Ownership and custodianship of data collected by the Africa RISING Program are a sensitive issue. Each participating CGIAR Center is responsible to provide assistance with publishing the data sets in line with open access policy. Open access means that the source of the data and some overall information about the datasets are freely accessible, but not the detailed research data. A contact person should be stated in case somebody would like to access those data.

The general principle underlying this program's activities is that all data are under the shared ownership of all program partners.

- Each research team will appoint one person responsible for uploading and monitoring Feed the Future (and custom) indicators on Project Mapping and Monitoring Tool (PMMT).
- Custodianship will be determined by the capacity of the responsible organization and staff to hold and distribute data securely and according to the rules set by CGIAR Data Access Policy.
- To ensure custodianship all meta- and unit-record data have to be uploaded on the Comprehensive and Knowledge Archive Network (CKAN) following the Africa RISING data management policy (IFPRI, 2014). According to this policy, data provider and custodian might keep unit-record data for his/her exclusive use for a limited period of time (depending on the data type) only for publishing purposes. For necessity and urgency of Program needs, this period could be lifted if unit-record data are necessary for a better management and higher impact of the Program's interventions. Thereafter, unit-record data will have to be made available to other colleagues (within and outside the Program) upon request.
- Access to sensitive social science data should be particularly restricted meaning, the datasets

need to be published for reference but not for full access. They will not be made accessible at any time.

- Publication rights are shared amongst all partners but original data collection and provider teams should be acknowledged in all cases. Authorship is granted to all partners who participate in the design, analysis and findings of studies that make use of project data but is not required for data collectors and providers.
- Researchers who intend to publish research results should invite all colleagues who participated in at least one stage of the research process (design, implementation, analysis) to contribute to the publication.
- Any publication for the Africa RISING and CGIAR repositories has to follow the [Africa RISING branding guidelines](#) that are in line with the donor branding policy.
- Researchers should maintain that the ultimate owners of the data collected are the farmers. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged to exert any efforts to engage communities and their members when reporting back the research findings to increase ownership of research findings.
- Consideration of gender perspectives in data analysis, interpretation and dissemination will enhance design of appropriate interventions.
- Maintain anonymity and confidentiality of farmers participating in the research. Researchers need to adhere to standard anonymization protocols in handling identifying information keeping it separate and in a safe place, provide utmost confidentiality of farmers' data.
- Ethical clearance must be obtained from relevant authorities for any data collection activities that involve human subjects.
- Taking and publishing pictures or any information that allow tracing back to individuals should be done only upon their consent and in accordance with the donor, institution and Africa RISING data management policies.

Incentive mechanisms

- The issue of offering project participants incentives to join activities requires sensitive handling, particularly in relation to the options that are open to other agencies operating in the same area that may not be able to “compete”.
- Africa RISING has been using different incentive mechanisms to make sure that long term community benefits will not be at stake because of insensitivity to short term expectations. The main incentive for farmers is to participate in the action research (research trials) and community based activities such as seed multiplication, that include technological and technical inputs for the sustainable intensification activities on crop, livestock, tree and natural resource management activities. Non-participating farmers also do have access to farmers-to- farmers technology transfer through their participation in field demonstrations or trial evaluation events such as farmers' field days and participatory variety selection. Other incentives can be in form of cash or in kind. Farmers receive inputs (fertilizers, seeds, tree seedlings, small livestock) when they manage trials and the harvest is kept by them. For the time they spend with survey teams they are usually given a small token such as a soap bar or a bag of salt.

- The program has guidelines concerning payments to farmers and other local partners during participation in various events, including field days, experience sharing visits, trainings, workshops and survey activities. Often, these events are organized in places where participants have costs for transportation and meals. In such cases, Africa RISING provides judicious compensation in cash. When there are no expenditures, no money will be paid.
- Experience sharing events, trainings, our participatory research approaches and gender sensitivity are other forms of incentives that are helping Africa RISING in making farmers see the benefits of our research interventions.

Conclusions

Participatory research requires active involvement of farmers and other stakeholders in the different stages of the research processes. The required level of engagement may not be achieved without respect of stakeholders as equal partners and recognition of their key role and input. Participatory research also requires proper understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political factors and how they influence participation, buy-in and compliance. Gender, ethnicity, religion as well as other socio-demographic and cultural/social norms in access to resources, division of labour and institutional factors need to be considered throughout the process.

Specific training might be necessary to ensure that participatory and gender sensitive approaches are followed by Africa RISING researchers and partners. The Program will conduct a needs assessment and provide the necessary resources to train the researchers and partners.

These guidelines will be reviewed and adjusted in line with evolving CGIAR guidelines around engagement, ethics, and data management.

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